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KAZAKHSTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Partnership Improves Health Care

USAID partners with a private company to improve maternal and child health in the Kazakhstan's capital city.



A young mother with her medical care provider at the Astana Maternity Hospital #3.
Photo: ZdravPlus

"I can really see a difference between the old approaches and the new. . . this feels right in my heart. Our outlook has been changed."

- Olga, an obstetrician at Astana's Maternity Hospital #3.

March 14, 2006 marked the start of the third Global Development Alliance (GDA) project in Astana, funded jointly by USAID and ExxonMobil, and implemented by USAID's ZdravPlus project and the Kazakhstan Association of Family Physicians. This year's project, entitled Partnership for Healthy Motherhood in Astana, focuses on improving maternal and child health in Kazakhstan's capital by shifting toward less medicalized, more woman, child, and family-centered, evidence-based prenatal care, delivery, and postpartum care.

In early April, the first training took place under the project, bringing international instructors to Astana to train local doctors on the WHO's Safe Motherhood Curriculum. A total of 36 participants successfully completed the course, including 16 practicing obstetricians and gynecologists, 4 obstetrics instructors from the medical university, 7 neonatologists, and 9 midwives. The WHO methods call for fewer prenatal visits, clean birth as opposed to sterile birth – which means that women can have partners with them during labor and delivery – letting women choose their own positions, and keeping the newborn with their mother at all times, among other non-medical interventions.

According to Olga, a young obstetrician at Maternity Hospital #3, the changes introduced in the course are being implemented already, and women who are delivering with the Safe Motherhood approaches in place have been extremely satisfied with the experience. "Though I have been working as a doctor for only four years," says Olga, "I can really see a difference between the old approaches and the new. . . this feels right in my heart. Our outlook has been changed."

Olga participated in the training on prenatal counseling techniques for preparing couples for labor, delivery, and newborn care which took place in early June under the project. The course aims to facilitate the establishment of prenatal preparation schools at two facilities in Astana, including Olga's facility, Maternity Hospital #3. In addition to training providers on how to work with expectant couples and address concerns such as nutrition, relaxation techniques for labor and delivery, and family planning, the Project will provide educational materials and equipment such as balls, exercise bars, and TV/video players for the schools. As Olga explained, in her opinion, the best thing about the course was that it provided concrete steps the providers can follow in running the classes for the general public.

The clinical training activities under the GDA are being complemented by population education. In addition to the planned opening of the prenatal preparation schools, work is underway for production of a video clip on the importance of partner deliveries and preparation for labor and delivery to be aired on Astana television. Providers are also being given brochures on post-partum family planning and breastfeeding to be shared with their patients.